

What About Septic Systems?

Clark County Health Department

Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Program

Septic System O&M is something we are hearing more and more about these days. The following information is very important, and if you follow the suggested guidelines, can save you \$6,000—\$14,000 AND some serious headaches!

When was the last time you changed the oil in your car?

Now...when was the last time you checked your septic system or had it pumped? Can you remember?

Do you know where your septic system or drain field is located?

Once a septic system is installed routine operation and maintenance is needed to assure it continues to operate correctly.

Here are a few simple ideas to help extend the life of your septic system.

Why are we doing this?

Because it's the law. WAC 256-272-15501, On-Site Sewage Systems, was enacted by the Washington State Department of Health on January 1, 1995.

DO

1. Know where all parts of your septic system are located!
2. Inspect your system and tank levels annually.
3. Pump the tank regularly (every 3-5 years, or when solids fill 1/3 of the tank).
4. Use water wisely! Use low-flow faucets, showers & toilets, run washer & dishwasher one at a time, spread laundry over the entire week, avoid partial loads, showers use less water than baths, limit shower length. Fix all faucet & toilet leaks promptly.
5. Direct runoff from roofs, streets, driveways, and adjoining properties away from drain field.
6. Keep any irrigation/sprinkler at least 10 feet from the edge of the septic system.
7. Use phosphate-free detergent. Follow guideline amounts on the package.

DO NOT

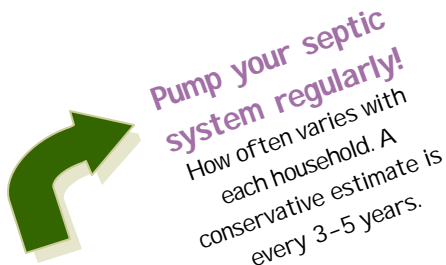
1. Use a garbage disposal. Putting solids and grease into the system may lead to drain field failure.
2. Drive/park vehicles (including boats) over the drain field or reserve drain field.
3. Use tank additives or miracle system cleaners.
4. Flush non-biodegradable items such as:
 - Diapers
 - Cigarette butts
 - Coffee grounds
 - Tampons/sanitary napkins
 - Condoms
 - Grease/oils
 - Kitty litter
 - Plastics
 - Paper, other than toilet paper
 - Bones.
5. Discard medications (like antibiotics) or anti-bacterial products down drains).
6. Plant trees, shrubs, or a vegetable garden over the drain field.
7. Cover the drain field or reserve area in any way!



Clark County Health Department

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Is This Program Working?

YES!

More than 4,350 septic system owners received maintenance notices in 2002. Only 2-3% of the systems inspected as a result of those notices needed repairs.

These repairs, far less expensive than replacing a septic system, will result in the systems working better and lasting longer.

Protect the life of your
septic system, protect the
environment, protect your
health, your investment,
and your property!

If You Have a Septic System, You Hold the Key to Water Quality!

90% of the water pollution in Washington comes from rain runoff, snowmelt, and other unseen, hard-to-pinpoint sources swept along with the flow. One major cause of this sneaky pollution is a failing ONSITE SEPTIC SEWAGE DISPOSAL (SEPTIC) SYSTEM.

Yes, septic—hidden wastewater treatment plants in many of our businesses, our restaurants, our motels, and our homes.

There are approximately 40,000 septic systems in Clark County. Another 550–600 new systems are added each year.

Approximately 2-3% of our septic systems fail each year. That means approximately 900 will fail annually in Clark County. A septic failure means untreated wastewater is being discharged into the soil, into a waterway, or into underground water. What does this mean? **Raw sewage. A health hazard. Disease.**

You can beat the odds of your system becoming one of these with sensible septic use and simple, routine maintenance. Just service your septic system like you service your car. Or down the road you might have to repair or replace it... **Just like a car.**

What Are We Protecting? Groundwater!

A watershed is a land basin, defined by a dividing ridge of high ground that drains into a common outlet; **like a giant landscape sink.**

All land is in a watershed, small ones inside big ones. The **water** underground and on the surface of your property connects to your neighbors', and ultimately to all other waters in your watershed.

It carries any pollutants with it too — downstream to drinking water, and to the ocean.



Questions?

For more information regarding the O&M Program contact one of the following people:

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Or visit the Department of Health website at:

www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/waste.htm

Office Hours

Monday–Friday
8:00am–4:30 pm

